



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405
March 13, 2016

Dear Interested Party:

This letter is to notify you that I have made a decision regarding Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) implementation of an agricultural lease renewal on 103 acres of the Beckman Wildlife Management Area (WMA). My decision is to move forward with the proposed action. The lease will continue the use of agricultural fields on the WMA for the benefit of wildlife and a neighboring lessee, as described in the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA).

No public comments were submitted regarding this agricultural lease renewal. No modifications have been made to the Draft EA. Please consider your previous copy of the EA along with this Decision Notice as final.

It is my recommendation to move forward with the proposed agricultural lease renewal on 103 acres of the Beckman WMA. The final decision will be made at the Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting, April 14, 2016.

Thank you for your interest and involvement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Bertellotti". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gary" being more prominent.

Gary Bertellotti
Region 4 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5840
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Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

DECISION NOTICE

Beckman WMA-Roe Ranch Cooperative Grazing Lease
Region 4 Headquarters
4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5840

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION:

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) proposes to renew a cooperative grazing lease on 4,921 acres of the Beckman Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and adjoining 2,695 acres of the Roe Ranch, northeast of Denton, MT. This lease agreement would continue the use of prescriptive livestock grazing as a habitat management tool on the WMA while positively influencing privately-managed wildlife habitat.

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA) PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT:

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks is required by MEPA to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information. Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks released a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for public review of this proposal on January 27, 2015 and accepted public comment until 5:00 P.M. on February 26, 2015.

Notice of the proposal and availability of the Draft EA was published in the *Lewistown News-Argus* and *Great Falls Tribune*. Copies of the Draft EA were distributed to neighboring landowners and interested individuals, groups, and agencies to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. The EA was available for public review on MFWP's website (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "Public Notices") from January 27, 2015 through February 26, 2015. An MFWP statewide news release was issued January 27, 2015 and also posted on MFWP's website the same day.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT:

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks received one total comment (via online), which was a comment implying opposition.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENT:

Comment: Grazing and wildlife don't mix; the [Beckman WMA] has great potential as habitat for birds and deer. Livestock beat down native grasses and introduce weeds from neighboring land. I think the best thing that can happen is the introduction of fire to get native grasses growing and naturalize the landscape.

MFWP Response: Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks recognizes this concern, as potential impacts of grazing to fish, wildlife, and their habitats are well-documented in the scientific literature. Also well documented are the potential benefits or conservation that can be achieved through carefully-planned livestock grazing strategies. Due to these concerns, the grazing system implemented on the Beckman WMA was designed to minimize the potential impacts to fish, wildlife, and their habitats and to benefit

those entities. Additionally, the grazing system is on a portion of the Beckman WMA, not the entire WMA. There are portions of the WMA that do not receive any livestock grazing treatments.

This grazing system is done cooperatively with the neighboring landowner, who used to continuously graze livestock all year long. The landowner now grazes livestock according to MFWP grazing standards (see pages 16 – 18 in the Draft EA). Every year, two of three spring and summer pastures receive growing season rest, the and the remainder (outside of one spring pasture) of the Roe Ranch receives permanent growing season rest. The grazing system, combined with the free, walk-in public hunting that is provided by the Roe Ranch as a condition of this agreement, expands the conservation footprint on the landscape in this area.

Prescribed fire was not considered as a preferred alternative in this EA due to concerns with human safety, landscape topography, and the proximity of private land. Controlled burning is not an option due to the area having no firebreaks, along with large grassy benches where fires can easily get out of control and travel to adjacent private land.

DECISION NOTICE

Using the EA and public comment, a Decision Notice must be rendered by MFWP which addresses the concerns and issues identified for this proposed action.

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks' analysis supports renewing the cooperative grazing lease agreement for an additional three years.

I find there to be no significant impacts to the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

After review of this proposal, it is my decision to accept the Draft EA as supplemented by this Decision Notice as final, and to recommend the renewal of the cooperative grazing lease on the Beckman WMA.

The Final EA may be viewed on MFWP's website, or be obtained upon request from MFWP's Region 4 Headquarters.

March 3, 2015

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary Bertellotti", written in a cursive style.

Gary Bertellotti
Region 4 Supervisor